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KEEPING IN *Focus* WITH PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

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MEMORANDUM

To: Agency Heads
Deputy Administrators For Management
Personnel Officers

From: Administrative Assistant Secretary

The caliber of people we hire and the way they are motivated and develop does much to determine the level of our management proficiency. I concur with former President Harold W. Dodds of Princeton when he stated, "Management is not the organization of labor; it is the development of individuals."

We should always stress the importance of recruiting first rate people and their training and development as the foundation on which to improve management. In my view, this is currently the greatest challenge to personnel management in this Department.

I think that it is important that we exchange ideas on this important aspect of management from time to time. Personnel "Tips" should prove useful to us.

Let's try it!

Se Robertson

EMPLOYEES SPEAK OUT

Approximately 8,000 employees throughout USDA, Washington and field offices, received an "Employee Questionnaire on Personnel Policies" from Secretary Freeman during the month of August. This was a ten per cent sample of all employees, other than temporary personnel.

More than eighty percent of the employees in the sample returned the completed questionnaire. In addition to answering the 108 numbered items, forty per cent submitted written comments. All comments were copied and grouped by related subject. Numbered responses were tabulated by data processing machines.

Results of the survey are being referred to work groups of the Steering Committee for the Personnel Policy Review Meeting in Philadelphia the week of September 25, 1961.

Employee reaction to this activity is gratifying. They are appreciative of the opportunity to express themselves for the good of the Department. Comments are directed toward every area of personnel management. The majority indicate a sincere desire to be helpful - not just gripes. From these we should be able to direct our resources in a positive manner to accomplish more effective personnel administration in areas of determined need.

HEALTH BENEFITS OPEN SEASON

Once again, we will be confronted with the huge task of enrolling employees for health benefits. The open season starts October 1 and runs through October 16, 1961.

During open season, employment and payroll offices must move rapidly and with precision. The procedure has been streamlined this year to eliminate wasted motion and to accomplish the task within the short time allotted.

1. Order and distribute brochures and informational material to employing offices without delay.

HEALTH BENEFITS OPEN SEASON (Cont'd.)

2. Distribute materials to employees as soon as all materials employees are to receive are on hand, or September 29, 1961, whichever is earlier.
3. Inform employees promptly and fully on the "open season," its purpose and procedures they are to follow.
4. Counsel employees objectively and preserve their right to choose for themselves.
5. Process SF 2809's for employees making changes as promptly as possible. Expedite these daily as received by moving them on to the payroll unit with cautionary statement that they do not proceed to the carrier prior to October 1, 1961.
6. Work hand in glove with payroll units to assure effective procedure for handling cases of employees making no change where the plan has changed subscription charges.

ADP - PERSONNEL STATISTICS

The Commission's improved personnel statistics program which will affect all Federal agencies will be underway in a few months. This program is designed for ADP. It is to serve a number of purposes which have been unattainable under the current method of compiling data. Through a 10% sampling, the Commission will be able to maintain work history information and to compile many of the regular recurring reports now prepared by the agencies.

Necessary to the accomplishment of the objectives in mind, are revisions of several of the basic personnel forms from which statistics are obtained. The SF-50, SF-52, SF-90 and LA employment form AD-294 will be revised. Eventually the SF-113 will be reduced to about 1/3 its present contents.

The revised forms are expected to be available during October 1961. Mandatory use of these forms will be effective around the beginning of calendar year 1962.

TIPS From: ARS Personnel Officer

John McAuley

ARS COLLEGE RECRUITMENT PROGRAM PAYS DIVIDENDS

Back in 1958, ARS began an organized program of college recruiting. Key program officials of the agency, headquartered on or near the campuses of the various land-grant colleges and universities, were designated by Administrator Shaw as "contact representatives" at the respective institutions. A series of meetings with these representatives was held at the four ARS Regional Business Offices to explain the program and the role each representative was expected to play.

This ARS program has two broad objectives. The first is to inform college students about the agency, its missions and programs, and the opportunities it offers for scientific and technical careers. This is accomplished through planned distribution of agency literature, channeled by the representatives to Department heads, faculty members, college placement officers, fraternity houses, libraries, and officers of various student organizations on campus.

The award winning motion picture "Breakthrough," produced and released in 1960 by ARS through the USDA Motion Picture Service, has proved to be a most effective tool in publicizing ARS farm research and the employment opportunities existing in this research area. Well-planned exhibits, participation in college Career Days, and talks before classes and organized student groups also help to bring ARS to the attention of students, especially potential scientists and engineers. The ARS contact representatives are key figures in this phase of the program.

The other major objective of the ARS college recruiting program is the actual recruitment of top-quality college-trained people. Each quarter the agency publishes its recruitment needs for the balance of the fiscal year. The lists are sent to the contact representatives and serve as an index to overall ARS job opportunities. These openings are made known to the appropriate departments on campus. Recruitment for research talent is geared heavily to graduate students, particularly Ph.D. candidates. On the other hand, ARS regulatory programs, such as plant pest control and plant quarantine inspection, rely heavily on bachelor-degree candidates.

In some cases the ARS contact representative initiates contacts with specific students he may learn of who possess potential for scientific positions. However, as he becomes known and established in his role as a "recruiter," students often call at his office or laboratory for information on job opportunities. He is in a position to provide information on Civil Service examinations for which students are qualified and should apply for; he can describe the general areas where the student may fit into the organization; and he frequently gives assistance and advice to students on the filling out of the applications they will be sending in for Civil Service rating. Interview forms are completed for outstanding prospects and these are channeled to agency headquarters offices. In this way program officials are apprised of students' qualifications and interests, and get an evaluation of the prospective candidates by an ARS official on the scene.

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ARS COLLEGE RECRUITMENT PROGRAM
PAYS DIVIDENDS - Cont'd.

Each contact representative is assisted on the campus by other ARS colleagues representing other disciplines and work programs. A feedback system is used to notify the contact representative each time a student from his institution is appointed to a job in ARS. The representative channels a copy of this notification to the College Placement Office.

ARS's college recruiting program is probably unique, for through its cooperative programs with the States the agency can maintain personal recruitment contacts on campus on a year-round basis. We know of no other organization in this position on such a widespread scale. Nearly 75 per cent of the approximately 500 ARS recruits appointed annually are products of land-grant colleges and universities. ARS is represented at almost every such major institution. Since it is essential that the recruiting activities of the representatives not interfere appreciably with their official scientific work, many give willingly of their off-duty time. This is typical of the teamwork and cooperation which has gone into this program.

While the program has met with considerable success, the job is by no means done. Shortages of manpower still exist in many areas and competition for top-quality people is increasingly keen. Better ways to attract talent must continually be developed and pursued with vigor. With the new academic year just ahead, ARS is making plans it hopes will result in even more successful recruiting.

TAKE TIME TO READ IT BEFORE YOU SIGN!

You are called upon frequently to execute another official document (form) such as the Standard Form 57 (Application for Federal Employment), Standard Form 86 and many others. Some of these forms state (in fine print) that you are certifying as to the accuracy of the information contained in the form.

The law prohibits false statements under penalty of fine, and/or imprisonment. Therefore, if you, or someone else prepares one of these forms for your action, be sure to read the prepared form carefully before you sign.

USDA CLUBS

Did you know that USDA Clubs have been in existence for more than 40 years? During a cross-country field trip in 1920, Secretary of Agriculture Meredith realized that employees did not know employees and programs of other Department agencies in their cities and recognized USDA Clubs as a means to help correct this situation. Is there a USDA Club in your area? Are you an active member?

IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO!

Is a doctor's certificate absolute proof that an employee was sick or that his absence was justified? Not necessarily. If you have reason to doubt that an employee was kept from work by illness, you need not accept the doctor's certificate covering that absence as the last word.

Regulations of this Department (8 AR 1078f) provide that unauthorized absence may be charged to absence without leave if it is not approved by retroactively granting sick or annual leave. We have recently been reminded by the Civil Service Commission in a report on a Section 14 appeal that the wording of Section 30.403 of the Annual and Sick Leave Act of 1951 permits an agency in certain situations to require substantiating evidence other than a medical certificate before approving an employee's request for leave. We are not obliged to accept automatically the executed Standard Form 71.

In a recent case the supervisor had charged an unauthorized absence as AWOL, even though the employee had presented a signed certificate from his doctor covering the period of the absence. Because of the employee's history of excessive drinking and unauthorized absence, the agency initiated an investigation including an interview with the doctor. The doctor stated that he gave the certificate because of the employee's statement that he was suffering from anxieties and not because of any physical signs observed during medical examinations.

If you have a problem employee who abuses his sick leave privilege, don't be afraid to look behind the doctor's certificate.